DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 355 676 EC 301 904

TITLE	Transition Planning for Young Adults with Intellectual Disabilities. A Resource Guide for Families, Teachers and Counsellors.
INSTITUTION	Alberta Education Response Centre, Edmonton.
REPORT NO	ISBN-0-7732-0722-8
PUB DATE	92
NOTE	12p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Education Response Centre, 6240-113 St., Edmonton, Alberta T6H 3L2, Canada.
PUB TYPE	Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Cooperative Planning; Education Work Relationship; Elementary Secondary Education; Employment; Foreign Countries; Human Services; *Mental Retardation; Needs Assessment; *Planning; Postsecondary Education; *Transitional Programs
IDENTIFIERS	Alberta

ABSTRACT

This guide for parents of individuals with intellectual disabilities emphasizes the need for a transition plan as a crucial stage in continuous service delivery for on-going supports and for fostering the individual's successful participation in the community. The guide contains three main headings. Under the first of these, "What Is Transition Planning?" it outlines five planning steps: determine the family's realistic wishes and preferences; explore options; evaluate son/daughter's skills and family resources; decide on future programs; and make applications for programs. Under the second heading, "When To Start a Transition Plan," the guide successively lists suggestions for parents of elementary, junior high, and high school-aged students. Finally, under the heading "Who Is Involved in the Planning Process?", the guide discusses the various persons that make up the individual student's "transition team"--typically, family members, teachers, other school personnel, social workers, speech, occupational and/or physical therapists and of course the student her/himself--and gives examples of their particular roles and responsibilities. The guide concludes with a list of questions parents/guardians should ask as well as a list of resources in Alberta (Canada) to contact for information and assistance. (JDD)

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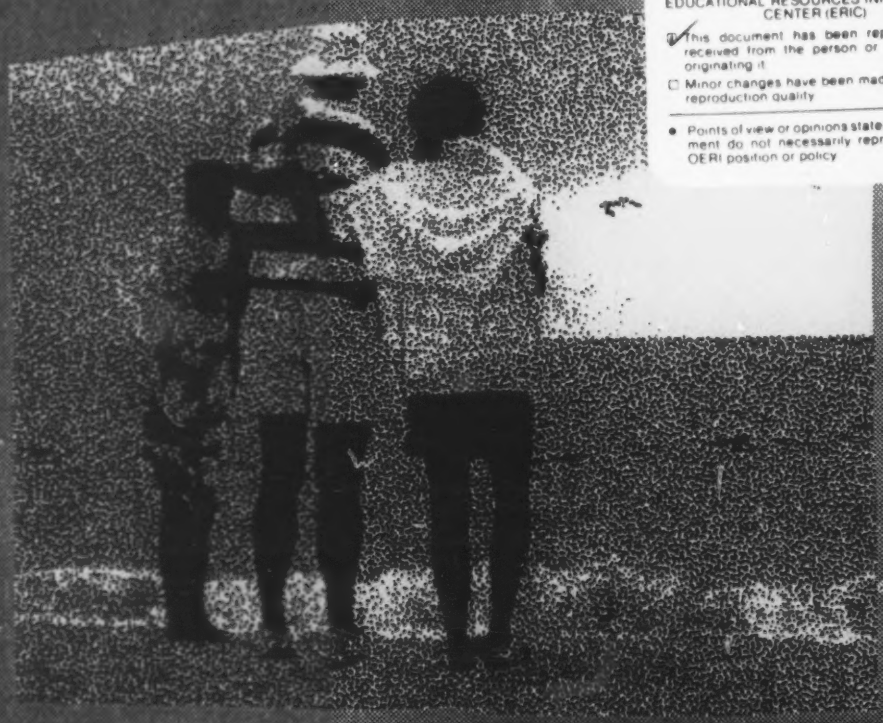

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A Resource Guide for Families, Teachers and Counsellors

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ALBERTA EDUCATION CATALOGUING IN PUBLICATION DATA

Alberta Education Response Centre.
Transition planning for young adults with intellectual disabilities:
a resource guide for families, teachers and counsellors.

ISBN 0-7732-0722-8

1. Handicapped youth -- Education -- Alberta. 2. Handicapped youth -- Employment -- Alberta. 3. Learning disabled youth -- Education -- Alberta. 4. Learning disabled youth -- Alberta -- Employment. I. Title.

LC4706.C22A33.A333 1992 371.928

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Transition Planning for Young Adults with Intellectual Disabilities

A Resource Guide for Families, Teachers and Counsellors

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AKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Alberta Education expresses its appreciation to the following individuals who assisted in the development and production of this document.

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WHAT IS TRANSITION PLANNING?

Transition Planning is a collaborative planning and implementation process for quality post-secondary education, employment and residential opportunities for young adults with intellectual disabilities. These are students who, although may not achieve the traditional level in academic subjects, can make good use of community-based educational, vocational and residential programs.

The plan should reflect the individual's priorities and lifestyle choices for the future. It should address goals in the areas of post-secondary program (vocational or educational), residential living situation, accessing community services, and recreation and leisure activities.

A well thought-out Transition Plan is a crucial stage in the continuous service delivery for on-going supports and fosters the individual's successful participation in the community.

Transition from school to work and adult support systems can be a very difficult and confusing time for individuals with disabilities and their families. A coordinated Transition Plan that begins well before graduation can ensure that students have vocational, residential and other services in place before they make this move. This type of planning helps reduce the fear associated with leaving school.

Ross is a young man, twenty-one years old, who has a mental disability. He shares a duplex with two room-mates and is enrolled in a community-based job training program. Ross visits with his family often, and is very happy with his life. But all this did not happen overnight. Ross's lifestyle is the result of careful planning that started well in advance of his graduating from school.

Five Steps in Transition Planning*

A. Determine the family's realistic wishes and preferences
   1) Expect dreams to come true.
   2) Develop a family vision for the future.

B. Explore options
   1) Be informed about the possibilities; ask critical questions.
   2) Evaluate how options meet needs.

C. Evaluate son/daughter's skills and family resources
   1) Be willing to do some soul searching.
   2) Consider the risks and costs.

D. Decide on future programs
   1) Take responsibility for hard decisions.
   2) Provide direction to the team.

E. Make applications for programs early!
   1) Be active and don't wait.
   2) Be persistent and ask for help.

*Adapted from Brotherson, M.J. et.al. (1986). *Transition to Adulthood*, in Summer, J.A. (Ed.) **The Right to Grow Up: An Introduction to Adults with DD** (pp . 17 - 44). Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes.

WHEN TO START A TRANSITION PLAN?

Informal planning for your child's future should begin at an early age. Formal Transition Planning should begin 3 to 4 years prior to graduation. This may seem premature, but many agencies and adult services have long waiting lists, and to avoid gaps in service, plans must be made well ahead of time.

Early planning gives parents and their son or daughter time to become familiar with available services and how the "service system" works. The student's Individualized Program Plan (IPP), the planning document used by the teachers and parents, identifies key areas of the child's schooling. During this time, parents can benefit also from support groups, workshops and visits or tours of specific agencies. Focusing on the future options while still in school ensures that all persons involved are working towards the same goals.

As a parent or guardian of a child with a disability, there are many things you can do while he/she is still in school to make the eventual transition process easier. Here are some suggestions:*

Elementary school-aged children:

- become aware of your child's eventual need to enter the work force. Speak positively about working and supporting oneself.
- be sure your child's Individualized Program Plan (IPP) addresses employment awareness.
- be aware of work experience opportunities available in the higher grades.
- point out workers to your child when you are out in the community. Discuss what that worker is doing and encourage your child to think about what job he or she might like to have.
- give your child specific responsibilities around the house. Insist that he/she perform all duties thoroughly and on time. Consider giving your child an allowance for completing duties.
- emphasize physical fitness and appropriate use of play time.
- encourage your child to dress and groom appropriately.
- Provide strong positive reinforcement for even the smallest task completed.
- find out about services available to adults with disabilities in your community. Also learn about "state of the art" vocational and residential options available in other areas and compare these to options in your area.

* Adapted from Moon S.M., Beale A.V. (1984). *Vocational Training and employment: Guideline for Parents*, **Exceptional Parent,** December, pp.35-38.

Junior high school-aged students:

- actively support the school's efforts to provide work experiences.
- see that your child's IPP addresses work skills, and functional social and community access skills that are taught in a variety of settings.
- start meeting adult service providers to explore what options will be available for your child.
- find work for your child to do during vacations, weekends, and after school outside the home.
- continue to work with your child on appearance, health maintenance and physical fitness.
- teach your child to budget money and to use banking facilities by providing a small allowance or pay for performing certain jobs.
- take your child to movies, restaurants, etc.
- let your child help with the grocery shopping, choose his or her own clothes and make other decisions.
- continue to discuss the importance and benefits of working and earning wages.
- get your child involved in community-based leisure activities and, if possible, teach him/her to use the public transportation system.
- make sure that community-based work experience is available in the high school program your child will enter.

Ross's foster mother began thinking about what Ross was going to do in the future when he turned 18. Ross applied for A.I.S.H. and the process started. At his teachers' suggestion, Ross and and his mother began looking toward graduation. They attended information sessions to find out what services were available. The options were discussed with Ross, who expressed his desire to get a job and move out on his own. At this point, Ross's mother was ready to begin planning, visiting some agencies and fillng out applications.

High school-aged students:

- make sure that transitional planning is an active part of the school program.
- meet with teachers, social workers and others involved in your child's life to formulate a plan.
- encourage the school to place your child in a variety of work settings during the high school years.
- make sure that appropriate services are in place before he/she graduates (educational, vocational and/or residential).
- continue to work with your child on matters of appearance, grooming, physical fitness, budgeting, completing chores, maintaining schedules, and use of community-based facilities.
- encourage independence and ample opportunities for community involvement.

WHO IS INVOLVED IN THE PLANNING PROCESS?

Each student has unique needs and will interact with different people. Therefore the make-up of each Transition Planning "team" will also be different. Usually, following the teacher's initiative, everyone who plays a significant part in an individuals life will be involved in the plan. Typically included are family members, teachers, other school personnel, social workers, speech, occupational and/or physical therapists, and of course, the individual.

Once the team is formed, defining roles and responsibilities is a crucial prerequisite for a smooth planning process. Roles will vary depending on the number of people involved in the planning process, and the amount of involvement of each party. Here are some examples of how the team works.

The individual

- should always be an active part of the planning process.
- should attend meetings, voice concerns.
- should contribute ideas and preferences as to where to live, what kind of work interests him or her, and what to do during leisure time.

Families/Caregivers

- are important contributors because of their continuous contact with the individual.
- need to let others know what degree they wish to participate in the planning process.
- should attend meetings, voice concerns and preferences.
- provide input into the individual's and family needs.
- explore available service options.
- visit agencies that seem suitable.
- select the best possible placement.
- provide informal home and community training.

Ross's planning continued with his teacher, his social worker, his foster mother and Ross himself, getting together and discussing the different options available. Responsiblities were divided among the planning team members, who also set up some timelines. The teachers helped Ross in his application for vocational placement; the social worker began looking into Ross's new living arrangements; Ross and his foster mother looked for potential roommates and residential staff.

Teachers/Counsellors

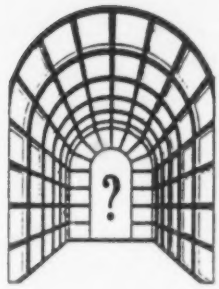
- generally initiate the transition process and coordinate the development of the plan.
- prepare students for adult opportunities by providing a functional and community-based school program.
- make parents aware of alternatives available to son/daughter upon graduation.
- provide parents with information about what to look for in an agency and how to compare services.
- encourage family members to participate.
- identify referral needs and ensure that referrals are made.

Client Services Worker/Social Worker

- attend meetings (especially important during last 2 years of the individual's school program).
- provide information about agencies and services to families and others.
- assist families with Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (A.I.S.H.), guardianship and trusteeship issues.
- provide information and assistance with the development of Individualized Service Plans.
- share the responsibility of referrals.
- accompany families/caregivers on agency visits.
- provide follow-up once the individual has graduated from school.

Everything was in place by the time Ross fininshed high school. He moved out over the summer, and began his training the following September. The key to his successful transition was careful planning, started well in advance of the anticipated move.

WHAT QUESTIONS SHOULD I ASK?



- Will this agency meet my son/daughter's needs?
- What is the agency's philosophy and is it similar to mine and my son/daughter's?
- Is the agency committed to community-based programs?
- What is the criteria for admission?
- Is there a waiting list? if so, how long?
- What qualification/education do the service providers have?
- To what extent are parents/family members involved in the service delivery?
- How long does follow-up/support of the vocational agencies last?
- What costs or fees are involved?
- What disciplinary action or consequences do they utilize?

WHOM DO I CONTACT FOR INFORMATION AND ASSISTANCE?

- **Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (A.I.S.H.)**
  This service is designed for individuals who have no other sources of income.

Edmonton	482-9665
Calgary	270-5411
Central Alberta *(Stettler)*	742-7586

  or call you local district office of Family and Social Services.

- **Public Guardian Office**
  Pursuant to the Dependent Adult Act, provides a legal guardian for adults who are unable to care for themselves and make reasonable judgments about personal matters.

Edmonton	427-0017
Red Deer	340-5165
Calgary	297-3364
Lethbridge	381-5648

- **Public Trustee Office**
  Provides administration of estates of mentally incapacitated persons who have been declared by the courts incapable of managing their financial affairs.

Edmonton	427-2744
Calgary	297-6541

Also, contact your local Office of Services for Persons with Disabilities, Personal Community Support Assocation, Family and Social Services, Consumer and Corporate Affairs, and Alberta Special Olympics.

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